

For the Birds:

Today's Webinar is titled FOR THE BIRDS. We will discuss intentional design and plant material that will better support our little feathered friends that we love so much and who are a very necessary part of our ecosystem. And I would like to also say, from the beginning, that though the topic today is on birds, I will occasionally stray to other critters too because a landscape that caters to the WHOLE is the end GOAL.

Birds require **FOOD, SHELTER AND WATER**. We will touch on all of these needs during this discussion. Creating a **desirable habitat** where all of these needs can be met is the goal. And it starts with transforming your landscape to model nature's design. Our native woodlands naturally create 4 layers.

1. Canopy
2. Understory
3. Shrub
4. Groundcover

The bird community is very complex and diverse. Some scavenge on the forest floor for worms and insects. Some like to perch in the highest reaches of the canopy level and others prefer to dance around in the shrub layers of the woodland forest. Creating these dimensions in your landscape supports a larger scope of bird species.

CANOPY LAYER:

The hardest of these layers to create, of course, is the canopy. If you already have mature trees on your property you are one step ahead of the game. If you do not or are looking to add a few more canopy trees to your property, I will discuss a few excellent trees to choose from.

A canopy tree is typically considered a tree who's max height hovers around 50 feet or more.

List of Canopy Trees:

Acer – Maples

- Rubrum – Red Maple
- Saccharum – Sugar Maple

Betula – River Birch

Carya - Hickory

Catalpa bignoniodes – Southern Indian Bean

Fagus grandiflora– American Beech

Liriodendron tulipifera – Tulip Poplar – State Tree!

Nyssa sylvatica – Black Gum/Tupelo

Platanus occidentalis

- Many birds are attracted to the seeds produced by this tree. It is also a favorite for cavity nesters such as the Barred Owl.

Quercus- Oak

- Oaks a great source of food for Squirrels, White Tailed Deer and Raccoons. Also the oaks are one of the best trees to choose when considering a host for a large range of insects (Which support bird populations at other times of the year)
 - i. Upland Oaks
 1. alba – White Oak
 2. coccinea – Scarlet Oak
 3. rubra – Northern Red Oak
 - ii. Bottomland Oaks
 1. bicolor – Swamp White Oak
 2. lyrata – Overcup Oak
 3. macrocarpa – Bur Oak
 4. nuttallii – Nuttall Oak
 5. phellos – Willow Oak

Sassafras albidum

Tilia americana – Basswood

If you are limited in space and can only choose 1 or 2 trees to add to your landscape my top picks would be Oak, Hickory, Sassafras and Tulip Poplar. These are my choices because not only do they make great canopy trees for birds, but they are also excellent host plants for various insect, moth and butterfly species.

UNDERSTORY LAYER

List of Understory trees

Aesculus pavia – Red Buckeye

- Flowers in the spring are great for pollinators and the seeds that develop later in the season are great for squirrels.

Amelanchier – Serviceberry

- There are many different kinds of serviceberry. Most common being Autumn Brilliance. My personal favorite is one called Rainbow Pillar. These are a food source for birds in the summer months but also make a great understory tree and the fall color is spectacular.

Asimina triloba – Paw paw

- If you are interested in the paw paw it is important to have several. One stand alone paw paw will not produce fruit. You must create a grove of them. So I would not recommend this understory tree if your space is limited.

Cercis canadensis – Eastern Redbud

- Certainly a Tennessee staple flowering tree. When these start blooming we are reminded that spring is just around the corner. Seed pods are desired both by a variety of birds and squirrels. Also something to note, because they bloom so early they are an important source of nectar for some of our early pollinating insects.

Chionanthus virginicus – American Fringe Tree

Cornus florida – Flowering Dogwood

Craetagus – Hawthorn

- Winter Hawthorn (Winter King)
- Washington Hawthorn

Diospyros virginiana – American Persimmon

Magnolia macrophylla – Bigleaf Magnolia

Morus rubra – Red Mulberry

- Definitely more of a summer fruit for the birds

Rhamnus caroliniana – Carolina Buckthorn

Understory trees specifically a food source for birds during the fall/winter months:

- Hawthorn
- Carolina Buckthorn
- Flowering Dogwood

SHRUB LAYER

This section holds most of the gems for fall and winter food for the birds.

List of Shrubs

Aesculus parviflora – Bottlebrush Buckeye

Aronia – Chokeberry (Self-fertile but helps to have a more than one)

- *arbutifolia* – Red Chokecherry
- *melanocarpa* – Black Chokecherry

Callicarpa americana – American Beautyberry (self-fertile)

- One of my favorite native shrubs! Seeds develop late into the fall and when they defoliate, you are left with lovely arching branches covered in light purple berries.

Clethra alnifolia – Summersweet

- There are many cultivars to choose from in this category. Seeds ripen in the fall and isw a great small seed for the songbirds.

Euonymus americanus – Heart's a Bustin'

- This is a unique native plant that grows in our woodlands close by. Seeds ripen in fall and it is a favorite treat for the bird that discovers it.

Ilex verticillata – Winterberry Holly

- Fruit on the winterberry holly stays on long after the leaves drop in the fall. Adding not only food for the birds but a wonderful sight to enjoy in your home landscape. This is a plant that has separate male and female plants and within this species some cultivars pair better with some than others so make sure that you do a little extra research to make sure you are getting the right pair.

Itea virginica – Virginia Sweetspire

- Seeds ripen in the fall and are a great small seed choice for songbirds

Sambucus canadensis – American Elderberry

- Fruit typically develops in late summer/early fall and is an excellent food source for birds.

Viburnum

- Dentatum – Arrowwood Viburnum
 - Blue Muffin and Chicago Lustre
- Nudum – Possumhaw viburnum
 - Brandywine and Winterthur

GROUND LAYER

Not too many woodland perennials offer much for the birds this time of year but there are a few to mention. There are plenty of lovely perennials to plant for other seasons but at the risk of going over my time, I will save that for a later date and a different discussion.

List of Ground layer perennials

Aster

- Purple Dome, October Skies, and Raydon's Favorite

Echinacea purpurea - Coneflower

- Stick to the single bloom varieties of Coneflower. The double bloomers do very little for the birds and pollinators

Eupatorium – Joe Pye Weed

- Fall to late fall is when these go to seed and are a great source for the birds

Solidago – Goldenrod

- Same applies

Vernonia – Ironweed

Panicum grasses are also a great source of seeds for the birds this time of year.

SHELTER:

Evergreen trees and shrubs are also a vital part of the landscape for birds. They offer shelter from storms and high winds as well as potential nesting opportunities.

List of Evergreen Sheltering plants:

Trees:

Cupressus arizonica – Arizona Cypress

Ilex opaca – American Holly

- Satyr Hill is a common cultivar found in the trade.

Ilex x hybrids – Though not native, these also make a great hideout for birds and a safe haven for creating a nest.

Juniperus virginiana – Eastern Red Cedar

Magnolia grandiflora – Southern Magnolia

Picea abies – Norway Spruce

Tsuga canadensis – American Hemlock

- Great food source for birds. Nesting site for the Barred Owl and other bird species.

Common Fall and Winter birds for our region:

Blue Jay

Cardinal

Carolina Chickadee

Carolina Wren

American Robin

Dark-eyed Junco

Eastern Bluebird

House Finch

Mockingbird (Tennessee State Bird)

Tufted Titmouse

White-throated Sparrow

Woodpeckers

- Northern Flicker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Pileated Woodpecker

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

- **Water** sources for birds is also an important part of supporting the local bird population. Not only does it offer them a drink but also an opportunity to bathe and cool off on a hot summer day. I position my birdbaths in places where I regularly drag my watering hose so I am reminded to refresh them when they get low or murky. Often people forget about their bird baths in the cooler months but it is also an important time for birds. I currently cannot keep my birdbath full enough. Sunday morning, I filled it twice. The Robins were having the best time drinking and bathing to their hearts content.
- **Leave the Leaves.** Leaving leaf litter both encourages earthworm and insect activity and offers that food source for ground feeding birds such as the Robin. Each year, I mulch my leaves up in the lawn and blow them into the beds.

- **Don't use pesticides.** Just don't. We desperately need our insect populations and those creatures support the big picture for us and for our feathered friends.
- **Add some Bird Houses**
 - I don't have much to add on this topic and still have much to learn. I have a book coming soon that will hopefully enlighten me further in my journey to support our bird populations even more.
- **Feeders**
 - Diversity within feeders: try having 1 with sunflower hearts and another that is a mix of Millet and other seed types. Also look into having a few suet feeders. These are a favorite for our woodpecker friends who visit us all throughout the winter months.

When designing a bird friendly landscape, food source diversity is number one on the list. Planting a lot of one thing does little for our ecosystem and our bird species. Explore your options and plant as much variety as you can.

Also, Don't be discouraged if you have a small plot of land. Even the little affects the whole and that little matters too! Perhaps consider getting together with your neighbors and creating a plan together of material that you can coordinate. They may think you are a crazy bird person, but if they do YOU WEAR THAT LIKE A BADGE OF HONOR!